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Senate

Hurricane Katrina (follow up)

Mr. President, before Senator *Durbin* leaves the floor, he has mentioned the 9/11 Commission. When he and I were first elected in the Congress in 1982--to the House--we arrived at a time when Social Security was not just rumored to be in dire straits but was in very dire straits. And an earlier commission was created similar to the 9/11 Commission but different as well. The Republican Members were appointed by President Reagan. As I recall, the Democratic Members were appointed by Democratic Speaker, Tip O'Neill, and I think by Senator Robert Byrd. The Blue Ribbon Commission was chaired by Alan Greenspan, with Members Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Robert Dole, and Claude Pepper, with whom we served in the House. They worked for a whole year trying to couple a combination of benefit cuts and revenue increases to enable us to put Social Security on a sound footing for another quarter of a century. I think that serves as a good role model as well as the 9/11 Commission, which Senator *Durbin* mentioned.

While he was on the floor, I wanted to remind him and us of that. But I think

our first response to the catastrophe is to make sure that people who need help get help.

First of all, get help in getting out of dangerous places to safe places, get help in reuniting families, get help in making certain their medical needs are met, having something to eat and drink, making sure the kids from K-12th grade are getting to the schools they need to get into, making sure students who have been displaced in college have a chance to get back in a college or a university to continue their studies without losing a quarter or a semester or a year, helping to create jobs and getting the economy moving in places that have been destroyed or badly damaged. Those are the kinds of things that need to be done and are being done.

While our startup was slow and disappointing, I believe, as time goes by, we are doing better. I commend all--not just in government, not just the first responders, not just the Guard, not just FEMA, which is doing a better job today, but also a lot of folks who are giving of themselves--volunteers from

my State, and all other States, who have gone to the region, giving blood, and raising money in our home States, receiving folks who have been displaced, to give them a home, a place to live, and a job for a while. Those efforts are to be commended. Those are the first responders. Maybe I should say second responders because the first responders were not even responding.

Second, last week, Senator *Coburn*, Senator *Obama*, and I spoke about the introduction of legislation which is supported by Senator *Frist*, by Senator *Reid*, our respective leaders, to create a CFO--chief financial officer--to serve as a watchdog so we don't find ourselves 6 months or 12 months from now looking back to see that we spent X billions so foolishly in response to Katrina, to make sure we get out ahead of this expenditure as best we can rather than looking at it after the money has already been spent, in some cases inappropriately.

The amount of money that is going to be spent in Katrina relief over the next couple of months will dwarf the annual appropriations that go to most of our Federal departments. Every one of our Federal departments has a chief financial officer. We need to make sure, when we are spending this much money this quickly to try to help a lot of people in a hurry, that we spend it wisely.

It is a bipartisan issue. We believe one of the ways to make sure we do that is to have a chief financial officer who is well qualified and can get on the job and do the work quickly.

The third thing I mention is oversight. I serve on the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. We

have obvious oversight of a good deal of what is going on, including the Homeland Security Department, FEMA, the Coast Guard, and any number of responder agencies. We have a responsibility to do our oversight. We have begun that oversight with hearings last week and informal hearings the week before that. We will continue this week and next week and on and on.

Our interest is in finding out what we did well, what we did collectively--State, local, Federal, volunteer organizations, military, National Guard, Armed Forces--and what we did not do well. Then, if this happens again--and we have another hurricane that is trying to round the corner in Key West today--to make sure if this comes north and revisits again, whether New Orleans, God forbid, or Mississippi--that we are better prepared to do more of the right things.

The last thing is the point Senator *Durbin* raised, the notion of an independent commission. I was skeptical as to whether or not the 9/11 Commission would enable Congress to do much good with respect to restructuring of our intelligence operations in this country. The intelligence operation in place had not been changed much for 50 years. I don't know if there was any reason to believe five Republicans and five Democrats could somehow find common ground and entice the rest of Congress to do the same thing, to work with the President to change in substantial, far-reaching ways the way our intelligence community works in this country. They did, and the 9/11 Commission provides an excellent template, role model, if you will, for how we should, once the first surge of oversight activity and the successive

waves of help and aid are out the door, proceed to make sure a couple months from now we are in a position, whether it is five Republicans and five Democrats--it could be a chairman appointed by the committee, a vice chairman appointed by our leadership, but to put in place a commission that might have the kind of success not for us, and not just for them, but for our country.

Success would be measured by better ensuring that a lot of the good things that happened this time in response to Katrina happen the next time--and we know there will be a next time--and we reduce the likelihood that some of the same mistakes and foolish choices will be made.

The American people would approve of that. It is great the President has asked the Cabinet Secretaries to look at what they did within their departments to make sure what they did was right, it made sense, and was appropriate. It is all well and good to have oversight here, but it would be helpful to have an independent commission that could stand back, not distracted by other issues we are distracted with each day, and impartially--led by people such as Governor Tom Kean and former Congressman Lee Hamilton--with good staff and only with this issue to focus on, and figure out what went well, what went badly, and how we can do better next time.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.